

ISLAM ON MARITAL RIGHTS

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FOREWORD

Sheikh Mubarak Ahmad Sahib, ex-Chief Muslim Missionary, East Africa, at the Annual Gathering of 1969 at Rabwah, delivered an enlightening and instructive speech on the subject of the duties and rights of the wife and of the husband as taught by Islam. That speech is now being printed for the benefit of the general public.

Conjugal relations not only play a very important part in shaping the structure of human society but also exercise a deep and far-reaching influence on the conduct and morality of future generations. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that every person should be aware of the duties which the Law of Islam has stipulated in this regard.

It is hoped that the perusal of this booklet will be of immense benefit to the reader.

B. A. RAFIQ,
Imam
The London Mosque

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

ISLAM ON MARITAL RIGHTS

“Men are guardians over women because Allah has made some of them excel others, and because they (men) spend (on them) of their wealth. So virtuous women are those who are obedient, and guard the secrets of their husbands, with Allah’s protection. And for those on whose part you fear disobedience, admonish them and leave them alone in their beds, and chastise them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Surely Allah is High, Great.”
(4:35)

I have been directed to throw some light on a very important feature of Islamic teachings. It pertains to the conjugal relations and the rights and duties of both the partners as laid down by the Law of Islam. This is a very important subject and it is desirable that the new-comers to our Community and our rising generation should be made acquainted with these laws.

The ignorance and lack of true understanding of these fundamentals have caused a great many complications and a great measure of unhappiness in our midst. Many a family has been ruined simply for a lack of a proper understanding of this aspect of Islamic teaching. Many a rupture and breach of harmonious relations has occurred because of this ignorance and indifference to the guidance and advice given on this subject by the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of God be upon him.

For the guidance of mankind, Allah has, in the chapters of *Al-Baqara*, *Al-Nisa*, *Al-Tariq* in the Holy Quran, very clearly explained the rules of behavior for the husband and the wife relating to their conjugal life. The Holy Prophet, peace and

blessings of Allah be upon him, has also given detailed instructions in this respect.

THE OBJECT OF MARRIAGE

First of all, it is very important to know what, according to the teachings of Islam, is the real aim of marriage. If we understand it thoroughly, we would then certainly try to achieve it. The Holy Quran says:

"And one of His signs is this, that He has created wives for you from among yourselves that you may find peace of mind in them. And He has put love and tenderness between you." (30:22).

In another verse we have:

"He it is Who has created you from a single soul, and made therefrom its mate, that he may find comfort in her." (7:190)

The above verses signify that marriage is meant for the attainment of peace of mind and mutual love and affection.

Allah has also called marriage to be the means of attaining piety and of guarding one's chastity. He says:

"They (women) are a garment for you and you are a garment for them." (2:188)

We all know that we wear clothes to cover our bodies and to hide our nakedness. Another purpose of wearing them is to protect our bodies from heat and cold. In the same way the husband and the wife must act as a cover for each other's weaknesses and shortcomings and for each other's chastity and honor.

Again, Allah says:

"... and you seek them by means of your property, marrying them properly and not committing fornication." (4:25).

Therefore, those who marry, in fact, enter into a citadel of safety which guards them against immorality and fornication. That is why the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be

upon him, has said that every young man of means must marry. Because marriage is, indeed, a sure means of preventing the eyes from looking with an evil intention and for preserving one's chastity and morality. On another occasion, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) prayed for those who marry with the intention of guarding their chastity.

Another purpose of marriage pointed out by Islam is the procreation of the human race. God says in the Holy Quran:

"Your wives are a sort of tilth for you; so approach your tilth as and when you like and send ahead some good for yourself." (2:224)

In this verse Allah has pointed out another important object of marriage, and likened the wives to tilth. He has exhorted the faithful to make their wives, *i.e.*, their tilth, fruitful and to observe all the necessary precautions in their conjugal relations so as to obtain good and healthy progeny, just as a wise farmer would act wisely in the selection and preparation of the soil and the sowing of the seed in order to obtain a good harvest.

The latter half of the verse, *"Send ahead some good for yourselves,"* confirms the noble object of marriage which is the production of healthy progeny, not only for a person's own benefit but also for the common good of the whole community.

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) has also referred to this object of marriage in his well known saying:

"Marry such women as are productive and of loving nature." (Nasae: Kitabun Nikah).

From the above it becomes quite clear that in Islam the aim of marriage is to enjoy each other's love and tenderness; to acquire peace of mind and physical comfort, to safeguard our chastity and piety and to maintain the procreation of the human race. Incidentally, it may be noted that Islam has discouraged marrying non-Muslim women. This is because the diversity of faith and mental outlook and the clash of concepts may lead to mutual bickering and consequently deprive the couple of the true happiness of married life, thus defeating the object of Islamic marriage.

EQUALITY OF RIGHTS AND DUTIES

The second point worth noting in this connection is that, as a general rule, both the husband and the wife have equal rights in the Islamic society. The Holy Quran says:

"... And they (the women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them in equity; but men have a rank above them. And Allah is Mighty, Wise." (2:229)

This verse lays down the basic rule that men and women as human beings have equal rights. If women are enjoined to discharge the rights of men, so are the men required not to deny the women their rights. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) has given detailed instructions concerning the rights of women and the care and consideration with which they should be treated. And it is a fact that no teaching of any other religion has laid so much stress on treating wives with kindness as has been exhorted by the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.)

The Lord God says:

"O ye people! Fear your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and created therefrom its mate..." (4:2)

This verse purports to say that both men and women belong to the same species and so have identical natures and similar feelings and aspirations. As man wishes that his likes and dislikes should be respected by his wife, so does she wish that her desires and aversions be given due consideration by her husband.

As has been already mentioned, the Holy Quran says, *"They (the women) are garments for you and you are a garment for them."* The Arabic word *Libaas* (garment) means a thing which covers another thing. And according to the Holy Quran, a garment serves a three-fold purpose. God says:

"O children of Adam! We have indeed sent down to you raiment to cover your shame, and to be an elegant dress..." (7:27)

And then He says:

"... He has for you garments which protect you from heat

and the coats of mail which protect you in your wars.”
(16:82)

Another use of our dress is that it provides protection against heat and cold. Since the Holy Quran has used the word ‘garment’ in respect of both the husband and the wife, it proves that they hold equal status; their rights and duties are identical in respect of each other. When God declares each of them to be a garment for the other, He wishes it to be known that they should discharge their duties towards each other which are as follows:

1. To behave in a manner that each other’s weaknesses and shortcomings remain out of sight of others.
2. To act as each other’s adornment and embellishment.
3. Just as the dress protects us from the severity and inclemency of weather, in the same way the wife and the husband should stick fast to each other through thick and thin and at no time should they fall apart in adverse circumstances. Each should serve as the rock of support for the other.

AN IDEAL WIFE

Khadijah, the first wife of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), could easily be presented as an ideal wife. After marriage, she voluntarily placed all her wealth at the disposal of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) to be used in any manner he liked so that the lack of funds should not stand in the way of his great mission which he had undertaken to execute.

On the occasion of receiving his first revelation, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) returned home in an extremely agitated state. When Khadijah saw him in that condition, she stepped forward and said:

“Oh no, by God, Allah will never let thee down for thou art a mine of goodness and kind acts.”

She thus consoled him and allayed his fears.

Though the Holy Quran grants equal rights both to the wife and the husband, yet it mentions an exception which is as follows:

"... The men have a rank above them (women). And Allah is Mighty, Wise." (2:220)

Basically, there is no distinction between the status of man and woman, but for practical purposes and for the smooth running of family affairs, men have been allowed a degree of superiority over women. But this superiority is like that of a magistrate who, being a man, is equal to all other human beings. Yet in the capacity of a judge he tries cases, gives judgments and decrees punishments. No other man has the right to do so. But the judge, while sitting in the court, exercises that authority over his fellow beings. Women in Islam enjoy equal rights in the social field and in matters of religion. But for the smooth running of family life, man has been made the head of the household and in that sense placed above the women. If that distinction were not there, discord and perpetual bickering in family life were bound to follow. Peace in the family can be ensured only when a family has a head with some authority to control. For that reason and in that sense men have been granted authority over women.

In the verse under reference, God has mentioned the attributes of His Might and Wisdom. The reference to His Might implies a reminder to men that they must always remember that all power belongs to Allah Who is Mighty and may punish them if they abuse their authority and ill-treat their wives. On the other hand the minds of women are set at ease by saying that since God Almighty is also Wise, there is a sound reason behind the distinction accorded to men. The reason is to ensure peace in the family. This point is discussed in the verse quoted in the beginning of this discourse. God says:

"Men are guardians over women because Allah has made some of them excel others and because they (men) spend (on them) of their wealth..." (4:35)

It has been said that the Arabic word *qawwaam* (guardian) in the above verse means 'ruler' or 'governor'. This is not correct. The word *qawwaamoon* is the plural of *qawwam* which is derived from *qaama*, meaning 'he stood'. If we say *qaama alaihi*, it would mean that he tended or took care of a certain thing or person. *Qama bil yateem* would mean that he undertook the maintenance

of the orphan; and *qaam-ar-rajolul-mar-a-ta* would mean that he maintained and looked after the woman and managed her affairs; he protected her or became her guardian. *Qawwaamun alaiha* means the provider of her sustenance. Therefore, the Quranic words *Qawwaamoona alan-nissa* in the above verse would mean that the men are the managers of the affairs of the women or that they undertake the maintenance of women. Thus the correct and true meanings of the word *Qawwaam* are – the managers of affairs or the providers of sustenance. ‘The ruler’ or ‘the governor’ is incorrect. The sense of ‘providing sustenance’, ‘to reform or educate’ and ‘to guard and look after’ is also implied by the word *Qawwaam*. It is obvious that anyone who assumes the duty of providing sustenance would automatically be responsible for looking after the moral, spiritual and physical welfare of the protégé. In consideration of this extra responsibility imposed upon men, they have been rightly assigned the role of authority over women. After all, it is not possible for each and every human being to hold the same and equal position. Each individual is an essential part of this huge machinery of world affairs and holds his separate position. If it had not been so, this machinery could not have worked. That is why the Holy Quran says that Allah has exalted some of you over the others.

EXTRA RESPONSIBILITY

The Quranic words *“because Allah has made some of them excel others”* further explain the reasons why men should hold a position superior to that of a woman. One reason is that man has been created physically stronger than woman for which reason he has been assigned the role of a bread winner for his family. For the same reason he is required to fight in defense of his country and the nation when the need arises. Another reason is that he spends his wealth to provide for the woman’s necessities. Man earns while the woman spends. These are the reasons for which Islam has placed man above the women in a sphere already specified.

In the *Tafseer-i-Baizaawi* the part of the verse: *“Because Allah has made some of them excel others...”* has been commented upon as follows:

“It is indeed Allah’s grace and bounty that He has endowed man with surpassing intellect, masterly skill and endurance for overcoming difficulties. He has been given a great fund of energy and drive. It is for this distinction that prophets, leaders and great rulers have always been men.”

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) has also said that man is the master of the family and shall be answerable for the actions and behavior of all its members.

Having explained and clarified the status of husbands, the Holy Quran proceeds to define what women owe to their husbands.

THE DUTIES OF WOMEN

“So virtuous women are those who are obedient, and guard the secrets of their husbands with Allah’s protection.”
(4:35).

According to this verse the primary duty of a woman is that she should be virtuous and well behaved. Wife’s good behavior is sine qua non for the success of a marriage. In the Arabic language the word ‘Saaleh’ (virtuous) means one who acts in a proper manner at a proper time. An untimely or an inappropriate act or that which is done without a purpose or is done more than what is necessary, is contrary to the sense of the Arabic word “Saaleh”.

A virtuous woman is the one who endeavors to promote the solidarity of the family; who is ever vigilant about the right upbringing of her children; who manages the affairs of the house in an efficient manner and in consonance with the wishes of her husband and who behaves towards him with due grace and decency. Such a woman does indeed make the house an abode of peace and contentment. If the wife does all this with the intention of obeying the command of Allah, her every single act shall be counted as an act of worship and shall earn her reward both here and hereafter, and the reward in the life hereafter is indeed the greatest. This reward of peace and bliss she shall enjoy as a result of her goodness.

PARADISE ON EARTH

The wife's second duty is that she should be obedient to and co-operative with her husband and give him the respect due to him as willed by Allah and His Prophet (s.a.w.). If the wife obeys her husband willingly and gracefully, she shall make her home a paradise on earth. Peace and contentment shall reign there and the husband of such a dutiful wife is bound to hold her in great esteem. Many wives do not consider it necessary to be docile and obedient to their husbands and insist on imposing their own wishes on them and want their husband to play the second fiddle. This is not correct. A good wife must obey her husband. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) once said: "If it had been lawful to prostrate before anyone besides Allah, He would certainly have commanded women to prostrate before their husbands."

WIFE'S IDEAL QUALITIES

On obedience to husbands, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) has given some clear instructions also. These are:-

- (1) The wife should not allow anyone into the house whom the husband does not like and if the husband tells his wife that a certain type of men and women must not enter the house, it would be her duty to comply with this direction.
- (2) The wife must not give charity from her husband's money without his permission. If she does so the reward for it shall accrue to the husband and the sin to the wife.
- (3) The wife must not go out of the house without the permission of her husband.
- (4) She may give any amount in charity out of her own possessions, but God Almighty shall approve and prefer that the woman obeyed her husband rather than give heaps of her wealth in charity.
- (5) The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) has said that no woman may fast, while the husband is in the house, without his approval, except the fasts which are obligatory in *Ramadhan*.
- (6) Once the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) said: "The best of wives is the one whose sight pleases you, *i.e.*, who keeps herself in a state

that may be pleasing to her husband; and when you ask her to do a thing, she obeys you and when you are away from the house she guards your property and her own modesty for you."

ONE EXCEPTION

One exception, however, has been made in the matter of obedience. The wife should refuse to obey if the husband wants her to disobey a command of Allah. For instance, if he ask her not to say any of her obligatory prayers or not to keep the obligatory fasts during *Ramadhan* or he urges her to take a hard drink or tells her to give up the Islamic purdah or asks her to partake of some indecency or immorality, she would be quite justified to disobey.

But in all other matters she must obey. If she does not do so she will be deemed disobedient, and the husband will be entitled to take disciplinary action against her in the manner and within the limits as prescribed by the Holy Quran for such cases. It says:

"And for those (wives) on whose part you fear disobedience, admonish them and leave them alone in their beds, and chastise them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them." (4:35)

Steps in respect of the above command have to be taken with the greatest care and due consideration. By leaving them alone in their beds does not mean perpetual separation. In the case of a very stubborn woman, who does not mend herself as a result of separation, which in no case should exceed four months, the husband should take recourse by giving a bit of corporal punishment. But this must be the last recourse.

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) has given very clear instructions on this point. He has advised that the punishment should be light, so light that it must not leave any mark on the body. And he has positively forbidden slapping one's wife on the face, for he said: "Do not hit her on the face." (Abu Da'ood.)

CRUELTY NOT PERMISSIBLE

For those men who beat their wives cruelly, beyond the above limit, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) has said that they are not at all good people. When he heard that some of his followers had behaved barbarously towards their wives, he expressed his displeasure and said that they were certainly not from among the best of men.

It is evident from the above reference that recourse to corporal punishment is to be taken as a last resort and is permissible only as a means for bringing the erring lady to her senses and to avert the disaster of the ruination of the family. If the husband abuses this right in any way, then the wife may exercise her right of seeking a divorce which is, of course, a step to be taken when everything else has failed.

A HAPPY REWARD

Stressing a wife's duty of obedience to her husband, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) is reported to have observed as follows:-

“A woman who said her five daily prayers, regularly fasted in the month of *Ramadhan*, refrained from evil acts and did what her husband told her to do, will, on the day of judgment, be authorized to enter into paradise by whichever of the door thereof she might like to enter.”

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) has said, “The best of women is she who adorned herself to look lovable in the eyes of her husband and who was pleased when he saw her; and she gracefully accepted decisions made by her husband and obeyed them cheerfully and she always took particular care not to displease her husband in any way or looked repugnant to him.”

A WARNING

On another occasion the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) is reported to have said, “There are three people whose daily prayers are not acceptable to Allah and none of their good actions ascend to heaven. The first is the slave who has absconded and does not return to his master, the second, a woman whose husband is

displeased with her and the third a drug addict until he gives up the bad habit."

It is also reported that once the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) said, "If a husband invites his wife to his bed and she refuses, the angels keep cursing her the whole of the remaining night."

Calling upon the women to realize their duty of obedience to their husbands, the Promised Messiah (a.s.) once said, "For the woman it is imperative that she should obey her husband. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) has emphasized this so much that once he said, "For the woman it is imperative that she should obey her husband." The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) has emphasized so much on this that once he said, "If a husband asked his wife to shift a heap of bricks from one place to another, and after she had done it, he told her to carry them back to the former place, she must do that without a question."

"This should not be regarded as a act of cruelty on the part of the husband for similar obligations have been imposed upon men also in respect of their wives. These obligations are so onerous that it looks as if the woman was placed on the throne and the man commanded to serve her and be at her beck and call for the procurement of everything she needs." (Malfoozaat: Vol. 8; pp. 441-445).

ANOTHER IMPORTANT ROLE

The third duty of women, assigned to them by the Holy Quran, is to guard and watch over the possessions of their husbands and to look after all their interests. Among these are included the honor of the family; their own chastity and purity, the secrets of their husbands, and the care not to squander away their wealth. They must also abstain from making demands which may be beyond the income of their husbands.

It is recorded that once the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) said, "It is the duty of the wife to look after your property when you are absent from the house and to guard her purity for you and to form the habit of saving for unforeseen needs and hard times. She must have a proper control over the household expenses."

THE SPHERE OF WOMAN'S ACTIVITIES

A very important duty of women is prescribed by the Holy Quran in the following verse:

"And stay in your houses with dignity." (33:43).

The above direction originally came for the wives of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.). But since the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) and his wives served as an example for the Muslims to follow, the injunctions addressed to him and his wives are meant for all the Muslims as well. This verse, therefore, calls upon the Muslim women to restrain their activities to their homes and not to go outside without a valid reason. They should stay inside the house with dignity and perform their household chores with grace and equanimity. When they talk, they should talk in a dignified manner. In fact, every single act of theirs should be full of grace and dignity.

The above Quranic injunction demands that women should mostly confine themselves to their houses. A tradition of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), reported by Ibn-Masood, says that a woman requires protection for her person. When she is out of the house, Satan draws near to her and when she remains indoors, Allah's mercy remains close to her.

This shows that it is not good for a woman to go out of her house unnecessarily.

Another tradition of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) is that he enjoined on the Muslims not to stop women from going to the mosques, although he believed that staying in their houses was better for them.

In yet another tradition we are told by the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) that a woman who abides in the house, engaged in her household work with a sense of duty and dignity, will be blessed with the reward of those engaged in a holy war.

NOT A TOTAL BAN

It is wrong to conclude from the above sayings that the woman is totally barred from stepping out of the house.

Hazrat Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad, the second Successor to the Promised Messiah (a.s.) has said,

“The Holy Quran tells us that women may go out of their houses. If they had been forbidden, the Divine command of “restraining the eyes” (in the presence of the opposite sex), contained in the Holy Quran would be a mere redundancy. The early history of Islam bears out that the wives and daughters of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) used to go out of their houses. Muslim women assisting men in battles; working in the fields, and gardens; going out to answer the call of nature and undertaking journeys to acquire education or to teach, are facts clearly recorded in history.” (Misbah: 1-4-1928).

Nevertheless, it is incorrect to hold that it is a part of a woman’s duty to go out and earn her own living by working in offices and factories. The true sphere of her activities is certainly her house. The Holy Quran commands:

“And the man to whom the child belongs shall be responsible for their (the child and the mother) food and clothing according to usage.” (2:234).

Thus it is the man’s responsibility to provide the necessities of life for his family and children, for if the woman is engaged in earning the daily bread, who will look after the family and the household chores? Who will rear and bring up the children and fashion their character in the proper manner?

HUSBAND – THE BREADWINNER

When I visited England in connection with the collection of funds for the Fazl-i-Umar Foundation, Mr. B. A. Rafiq, Imam of the London Mosque, related to me that a couple, both working somewhere, left the house for their jobs every morning. One day it happened that the husband came back a couple of hours before his wife. When she came, her husband asked her if the tea would be ready soon? The wife lost her temper and retorted, “Shut up! You are here for the last two hours. You could have prepared tea yourself!” Where both the couple work, such incidents are very common. May God help us! To earn daily bread is surely the

responsibility of the husband. In exceptional cases, in order to tide over one's straitened circumstances the wife may work. But just for the sake of amassing money, this practice is most undesirable.

In short, Allah has shown us a way of life in which women are supposed to stay in the house, engaged in their household work with dignity, upholding and enhancing the prestige of their husbands and their families by their own sterling qualities of character. Indulgence in quarrels and altercations over trifles, sarcasms and harsh words and constantly finding faults with the husband, are things undignified for good women. These must be avoided.

Abu Saeed Khudri has reported that once the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) happened to pass by a group of women on the occasion of an Eid. He said, "O ye ladies! go and give much alms, for among the dwellers of hell, I behold that women are in great majority." And when some of them asked him why so? He replied, "Because you are prone to mud-slinging and are often ungrateful to your husbands."

LIVING PEACEFULLY IS THE IDEAL LIVING

Another important thing for a woman always to bear in mind is that the martial ties that joined them under the command of Allah, are a sacred link and must be preserved steadfastly through thick and thin. The Holy Quran says,

"If a woman fears ill-treatment or indifference on the part of her husband, it shall be no sin to them that they be suitably reconciled to each other; and reconciliation if best."
(4:129)

Here we are told that if a woman finds that her husband has been unfair and harsh towards her, she should try to bear it with patience. Somehow or other reconciliation must be made and the dispute settled. There is nothing better than reconciliation. Differences between the wife and the husband are bound to crop up. But if both parties use patience and tolerance, such ruptures are soon mended. But if the wife is unable to put up with her ordeal any longer, then she can ask for a separation, a course,

though permitted, is looked upon with great disfavor in Islam. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w) has counseled that in such an eventuality both partners should try to use restraint and do their best to reconcile. The wife may once again make an endeavor to adjust herself to the circumstances in which she has already spent a goodly portion of her life. It pleases Allah if man and wife live in peace and harmony and the whole family enjoys the bliss and happiness of life. God says, *"Reconciliation is always the best solution."* And He commands.

"If you fear a breach between them, then appoint an arbiter from his folks and an arbiter from her folks. If they (the arbiters) desire reconciliation, Allah will effect it between them. Surely Allah is All-Knowing and All-Wise." (4:36)

In fact, God has made it a combined responsibility of the Muslims to make every effort to preserve a marriage from breaking down and to bring about a reconciliation. Removing friction and restoring peace between man and woman is an act highly commendable in Islam which has made it the responsibility of the society and the community to do their utmost to save a marriage from dissolution.

THE RIGHTS OF THE HUSBAND

From the duties of woman, as explained above, the following rights of the husband upon the wife become apparent:

1. She has to look after the comfort of her husband, give him due respect and always to have regard for his feelings.
2. She has to safeguard the honor of the husband.
3. She has to be the guardian of the property of her husband.
4. She has to rear and bring up their children properly.
5. She should treat the relatives of her husband as if they were her own relatives.
6. She should adorn and beautify herself only for her husband.
7. She should bear in mind the tastes of her husband in the matter of food and dress.

8. She should be ever mindful of her husband's health.
9. She should give her most sincere advice when her husband consults her in any of his problems.
10. She should not make unfair and unreasonable demands on the purse of her husband.
11. She has to remain loyal to her husband under all conditions and be a source of strength to him in adverse circumstances and stick fast to him through thick and thin.
12. She should watch that the dignity and reputation of her husband are not damaged by any of her actions.
13. Under all conditions her behavior should be conducive to peace and tranquility in the house.

As God has fixed a number of duties for wives, to ensure protection of the husband's rights, so has He assigned duties to the husband to ensure that the rights they owe to their wives are not overlooked. The Holy Quran says:

"And they (the women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them in equity." (2:229).

THE DUTIES OF MEN

The Holy Quran commands the believers to "*consort with them (wives) in kindness.*" (4:20).

The above words of the Holy Quran are brief but contain every detail of how to make married life a success in every way. The stress that has been laid on men's duty to be kind to their wives is an exclusive speciality of Islam. The Arabic words '*aashiru*' and '*bil-ma'ruf*' used in the above verse signify that the husband's treatment of his wife should not only be extremely kind and affectionate but also of a type liked by everyone concerned. Over and above this, God Almighty exhorts the males as follows:

"And if you dislike them (women), it may be that you dislike a thing wherein Allah has placed much good." (4:2).

Here Allah points out that if it happens for some reason that a man begins to dislike his wife, he should not become dis-

courteous towards her, but even against his will, should treat her with consideration and if he will do so, Allah will change his hatred into affection, and will make their marriage a success.

It happens sometimes that the husband disapproves some of the manners of his wife or he finds little physical attraction in her. In that event if he acts with a little restraint and forbearance it is quite possible he may find that Allah had kept some great good hidden in store for him in her person, which was out of his sight before.

HOLY PROPHET'S ADVICE

The Holy Prophet's (s.a.w.) advice on this point is an excellent interpretation of this injunction. He said, "The best among you is he who is the best in his treatment of his wife." On the occasion of his last pilgrimage to Mecca, he made the following bequest in respect of women. "Be kind to women." And added. "women are under your control like prisoners. It is your duty to take very good care of them and provide for all their necessities and treat them with kindness and courtesy."

On another occasion the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) thus warned his followers, "Beware of the two weak ones – women and orphans. Discharge your duties to them well. Be kind to them and do not ill-treat them."

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) also said: "The most perfect in faith amongst you is he who is the most courteous, and the best among you is he who is best in the treatment of his wife, the more a man is good to his wife the greater shall be his value before Allah." The husband should therefore be very considerate and kind to his wife. He should always be anxious for her welfare and be cheerful while he is in her company. It should not be that he enters the house wearing an angry look and be a terror for everybody inside.

THE IDEAL HUSBAND

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), as is true of every aspect of his illustrious life, is incomparable in his treatment of his wives. He said, "I am the best among you in my treatment towards my wives." It is impossible to find his equal in the matter of kindness

and consideration which he showed to his wives. He never entered the house with a frown on his face. He was always cheerful. He used to amuse himself and his wives with cheerful and merry talks within the bounds of decorum. He assisted them in their household chores and it is recorded that once in a playful mood, he competed with his wife, Ayesha, in a short race.

Nasaa'ee reports that no man was ever as kind and courteous to his wives as the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) was while at home nor as jovial and mirthful. He used to help them in the chores of the house. For instance if his wife wanted to knead flour he would fetch water for her or would help her in kindling the fire for cooking. In short he never deemed it beneath his dignity to join his wives in their housework.

Hazrat Ayesha has reported that once the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) told her that he could always gauge her mood and knew whether she was pleased or displeased with him. She said, "How?" and the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) replied "When you are pleased you say, 'By the God of Muhammad I say . . .', but when you are irritated you say, 'By the God of Abraham.' she said "Exactly!", but added that such moments were short-lived and even then her heart was never devoid of his love, nor ever a cause of decrease in her affection for and devotion to him." (Bukhari and Muslim)

Hazrat Ayesha has also reported, "I once accompanied the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) on one of his journeys. On the way we stopped and in a jovial mood we both competed in a short race which I won. But a few years later when I had gained weight, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) had a race with me again and easily beat me, and then said, "This settles the debt I owed you!"

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) always treated his wives with the greatest kindness and never was an over-bearing husband who take pride in handling their wives rudely and keeping them terror-stricken.

WINGED HORSES

Hazrat Ayesha has reported that when the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) returned from the battle of Tabuk or Hunain, he observed

a curtain which hung over a niche in the wall. A gust of wind removed the curtain from over the niche and exposed her dolls placed inside. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) said, "Whose are these dolls?" She replied that they were hers. Among them was a two-winged horse about which he said, "Do horses ever have wings?" And she replied, "Well! I thought you knew Solomon's horses were winged ones." At this the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) burst into a hearty laugh. He laughed so much that his inner teeth could be seen. (Abu Da'ood).

It was the Holy Prophet's (s.a.w.) habit that he talked and joked and laughed with his wives within the bounds of decency and made them laugh as well.

Thus we see that it is not desirable for a Muslim to be disposed haughtily towards his wife and behave in the house like a tyrant. He should, on the contrary, create an atmosphere of amity, cheerfulness and understanding in the family. A Muslim couple must not stand upon ceremony with each other.

LUSTROUS SWEAT

Hazrat Ayesha says, "Once while I was plying the spinning wheel and the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) was sitting near me mending his shoes. I noticed that his forehead was covered with drops of sweat which appeared emitting a light whose luster increased as I watched them. I was greatly amazed and the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) looked up. He looked at me and enquired. "Oh Ayesha! What has amazed you?" and I replied, "O Prophet of Allah! In the drops of perspiration on your forehead I am noticing a lovely and sparkling light. By Allah! If Abu Kabeer Hazli had seen you, his verses would fit you admirably." The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) said, "Do you remember the verses?" I said, "Yes", and recited the following couplet:

"He is untainted with the defilement of childbirth and suckling; and if you look at his resplendent face you will witness a radiant, luminous flash of lightning playing thereon."

"Hearing this the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) dropped what he was holding in his hand, stepped forward and kissed her forehead and

said, "The pleasure you gave me by what you have said has, I believe, far exceeded the ecstasy of delight which the sight of the drops of my sweat have given you." (Rahmat-ul-lil-A'alaameen: Vol. 2, p.153).

A GOLDEN RULE

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), under Divine guidance, has shown us how to promote and preserve happy and cordial relations between man and wife. He has laid down a golden rule which, if followed, would serve as a bulwark against marital discord. He said that the husband should make it his habit to overlook trivial faults of his wife and not to make any fuss over such slips on her part. How true it is! After all she is a human being and is liable to err like ourselves. Therefore, Allah and His Prophet (s.a.w.) direct the husband to adopt the policy of forgive and forget. It is not human to raise hell in the house if the stew is over salted. Many a family has been ruined in consequence of such foolishness. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) has said, "No believer should ever bear a grudge against his wife because of an imperfection of hers, for if she has an imperfection, she has some lovable virtues also which please him."

There is a Tradition of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) to the effect that nothing pleases Satan more than a husband and wife quarreling with each other. He further said on an occasion that there were some people who exhibited great eagerness for getting married. But when they brought their wives to their homes, they neither cared to provide for their sustenance nor for their comfort. He said that it was the duty of the husband to look after the needs of his wife and to be kind to her.

Once a Companion of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) came to him and said, "Oh Prophet of Allah! Please define for us the rights of our wives." And the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) replied, "Provide for them all their needs and show no meanness in fulfilling their reasonable demands." (Abu Daood).

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) has laid so great a stress on the importance of cordial relations between man and his wife that once he said, "If a believer puts a morsel in the mouth of his wife

out of love, Allah will reward him for it, because it is an act which will please his wife who would feel that her husband loved her dearly."

CURVED RIB

Women are delicate by nature and are given to coquetry. It was in consideration of that nature of the fair sex that the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) once said, "Women could be likened to a curved rib, which, if you tried to straighten, would break. But you benefit from it only by retaining it curved."

Once the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) was accompanied by some of his wives on a journey. Anjasha, an Abyssinian slave, went along with the camels at a rapid pace singing the "Hudi" (camel driver's song) whereby the camels gained greater speed. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) called out, "O Anjasha! slow down, lest the glasses (meaning the delicate ladies) go to pieces." (Bukhari)

LADIES FIRST

Once Hazrat Safia, a wife of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), was traveling with her illustrious husband. She used to enwrap herself in a sheet and sit behind him on the camel's back. Whenever she had to mount the camel, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) offered his knee for her to step on. Now, the camel on which the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) and Hazrat Safia were riding, slipped and they both fell down. A Companion, Abu Talha, ran towards the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) for assistance. But the Prophet of God directed him to go to the aid of the lady first. (Bukhari).

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) likened women to the fragile glass. The simile purports to impress upon the males that since women are, by nature, delicate and weak, they deserve to be treated with due kindness and compassion.

The Holy Prophet's (s.a.w.) own behavior towards his wives was most kind and affectionate. That is why he once said, "In the matter of the treatment of wives, I am the best among you all."

ANSWERABLE TO GOD

It is, therefore, a matter of very great regret that some of us

turn our backs upon the profound guidance given to us on this subject by Allah and His Holy Prophet (s.a.w.). They are cruel and rude to their wives and forget that such a behavior is totally unworthy of one who claims to be a true Muslim and a sincere follower of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.). Owing to the barbaric treatment some men mete out to their wives, the poor ones, in their helplessness, even forego their legitimate rights granted to them by the Holy Quran. They readily agree to obtain separation from such tyrannical husbands and relinquish their lawful rights. But these men must bear in mind that, as forewarned by Allah and His Prophet, they will be answerable to God for this tyranny.

Thus we see that the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) was, in himself, a unique example of a kind and courteous husband and the wisdom of what he taught on this subject has no parallel in the teachings of any other reformer or religious leader.

EXHORTATIONS OF THE PROMISED MESSIAH ON TREATMENT OF WIVES

Dwelling on evils which have crept into the Muslim society contrary to the teachings of Islam and the example of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), the Promised Messiah has said, "In the matter of marital relations men have floundered and gone astray. The Holy Quran says, *"consort with them (women) in kindness."* But we see that this injunction is being ignored. There are two kinds of men. There are those who give their women so much liberty that they set at naught all the commandments of the faith and act contrary to the teachings of Islam. Nobody has any control or check over them. And there are others who have not allowed their wives unlimited freedom but they are so cruel and harsh with them as to put even the beast to shame. They treat them worse than one treats a serf or an animal. They beat them mercilessly as if the object of wrath was a lifeless body or that it was immune to pain or feelings. In short they treat them in the most inhuman manner. In the Punjab they say that a wife is but a pair of shoes that may be discarded at one's pleasure. This is an attitude much to be regretted. Such a behavior is totally inconsistent with the principles of Islam. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) is a perfect model for us in every walk of our lives. Look at the way he treated his

wives. To my mind that man is a coward who tries to settle a dispute with his wife with brutal force." (Malfoozat: Vol. 4: p. 44).

Similarly, in a special exhortation to his Community, the Promised Messiah (a.s.) has said, "Anyone who ill-treats his wife is not of my Community."

THE PROMISED MESSIAH'S EXAMPLE

Maulvi Abdul Karim, a noted Companion of the Promised Messiah (a.s.) , has, in one of his letters, described how the Hazrat behaved in his house and how he treated his illustrious wife. This letter has been published in the form of a booklet entitled "*The Character of the Promised Messiah.*" He writes:

"I would not proceed to mention how this viceregent of Allah consorts with his wife and members of his family. I do this because I believe that the greatest testimony to a man's greatness is that his behavior towards the inmates of his household is pleasing and his skill in the management of domestic affairs and his sense of propriety have turned the house into a veritable paradise; whose inmates do not suffer from heart burns and where jealousy, hatred and ill-will are not known.

"The Book of Allah which is full of wisdom says, '*consort with them in kindness:*' and our Master and Lord, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) – a manifestation of Divine blessings for the whole universe – who translated every Quranic injunction into practice, has said, "The best among you is he who is the best in his behavior to his wife.

"It is nearly 15 years ago when the Hazrat, under Divine command, entered again into married life and took upon himself the heavy and delicate responsibilities of that life. Throughout that long period no instance of discord or a jarring incident in the family has ever been witnessed.

"Once, in his presence, a mention was made of the harsh treatment of a friend towards his wife and it was stated that he had the habit of addressing her in a foul and insulting language. The Hazrat was greatly perturbed and said, "Our friends should not behave like this."

NO RUDENESS EVER

When a religious debate between the Hazrat and Abdulah Atham, the Christian divine, was in progress and many notable friends had come to attend that historical contest, it happened that during an interval a follower of the Hazrat, Munshi Abdul Haq, an accountant of Lahore, suggested, out of deep concern and affection for his Master, that his diet should be particularly rich and nutritious to get rid of the attacks of headache from which he suffered. The Hazrat replied, "Yes, you are right and I had once mentioned about this in the house, but women are so busy in their household chores that I think this must have slipped from my wife's mind and so nothing was done in this connection."

Munshi Abdul Haq said, "Sir, in my house, very special care is taken in the preparation of my food. It cannot be that my instructions in this respect are ever ignored. If ever a remissness takes place, I have then to resort to sterner measures. Sir, the fact is that you do not take the proper disciplinary action."

Hazrat Maulvi Abdul Karim writes that on hearing the above remarks of the Munshi Sahib, he himself felt greatly pleased as he also held the same view. He was glad that Munshi Abdul Haq had stated the point exactly according to his own wish. Therefore, he also, in support of it, added that it was advisable that the Hazrat should also be a little more firm in this matter. The Hazrat looked at me, smiled and said, "Our friends must refrain from such a behavior."

The Promised Messiah (a.s.) then went on elucidating the point further and concluded by saying that "I once shouted at my wife in anger and though I had not used any bitter or coarse word, I immediately realized my error. Then, for quite a long time I had to pray to God for forgiveness and I gave away some alms as well by way of expiation, feeling that the lapse had occurred due to some hidden and unknown act of omission on my part."

The Promised Messiah (a.s.) expressed strong disapproval if any of his followers ill-treated his wife or addressed rude words to her. This he considered to be a violation of the Islamic way of life.

A DIVINE DIRECTIVE

Once Maulvi Abdul Karim, who was rather of a stern and unsparing nature, scolded his wife in a rude manner. At this the Promised Messiah (a.s.) received the following Divine revelation:

“This is an improper behavior. Stop Abdul Karim, the leader of the Muslims, from this practice. Be kind! For kindness is the source of all virtues.”

To the above revelation the Promised Messiah (a.s.) added, “Maulvi Abdul Karim had been harsh to his wife at which came the Divine admonition forbidding harsh language. The foremost duty of a believer is to be of sweet tongue and to show kindness to everyone. No doubt the use of a harsh word is, sometimes, permissible like a dose of bitter medicine. But it must not go the extent that it may become one’s second nature.” (Zameema Tohfai-Golrawiya: p. 39).

NO HAND MAIDENS

Explaining the above revelation, the Promised Messiah (a.s.), in the footnotes, has given the following advice to his Companions:

“There is a lesson in the above revelation for our Community, that they should be kind and courteous to their wives. They are not their hand-maidens. Marriage, in fact, is a contract between a man and a woman. See that you do not dishonor this contract. God has called upon us in the Holy Quran to, “*consort with them in kindness*”; and the Hadith of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) in this respect is, “The best among you is he who is best in his treatment of his wife.” Therefore, be good to your wives both physically and spiritually. Pray for them and never contemplate a separation by divorce; for in the sight of Allah, the most worthless man is he who is quick in putting away his wife. Do not break in indecent haste, like an unclean vessel, what God had joined together.” (Tohfai-Golrawiya: p. 39).

Since the marital tie is brought about in the sacred name of

God and since God binds this tie, God has made it the duty of man to treat his wife with kindness and to overlook her weaknesses and shortcomings. The Holy Quran says,

“O ye who believe! Surely among your wives and your children are some that are really your enemies, so beware of them. And if you overlook and forgive and pardon, then surely, Allah is most Forgiving, Merciful.” (64:15).

SHIELDS FOR HUSBANDS

It sometimes happens that wives become a hindrance in the way of their husbands if they wish to participate in a religious cause or to make an outstanding monetary contribution thereto. This makes the task of winning one's salvation extremely hard. And very often the husband too succumbs to the unreasonable demands of his wife and is apt to turn his back to the call of his faith and his responsibilities to the Hereafter. That is why Allah has called such wives and children as man's enemies. But this does not mean that all women are of the same category. No! There are many who act as a shield for their husbands' faith, co-operate with them in doing good works and practice self-abnegation.”

God commands that it does not behove a good believer to repudiate, in a fit of anger, all his tenderness and affection for his wife and family and be ready to sever his connection with them. The right course for him is to try to reform the erring wife by overlooking and conniving at her recalcitrance and by being patient with her over her weaknesses. If he did that and fervently prayed to Allah, he was bound to attract Divine Mercy whereby his circumstances would have changed for the better.

THE PAYMENT OF THE DOWRY

Since man has been made *Qawwaam*, i.e., responsible for providing sustenance for his wife and is her guardian and protector, it has been made compulsory for him to pay a dowry to his wife as a token of acknowledgment of her role which she has taken upon herself to play as wife. God says:

“And for the benefit you receive from them (women) give

them their dowries.” (4:25)

But there are cases where husbands grudge this payment. But Allah commands that the dowry must be paid cheerfully and with good grace. God says:

“And give the women their dowries willingly. But if they, of their own pleasure remit to you a part thereof, then enjoy it as something pleasant and wholesome.” (4:5)

NO COERCION

The wife always has the right to remit to her husband a part or whole of her dowry, of her own free will; and if she does so, the husband will be free to use the amount so received as he likes. But the remission must be made by the wife, of her own free will. The Quranic words: *“If they, of their own pleasure remit...”* signify absolute freedom for the wife in this regard so that the husband will, on no account, maneuver by coercion or otherwise to obtain this remission.

It was for this very reason that the Caliph Omar and the famous Qadhi Shareeh gave their ruling that if a woman, after relinquishing her right to the dowry, at a later date, for any reason renews her claim for the payment of the portion remitted, it must be paid. The husband will have to pay it. The very act of her renewal of claim proves that she had been forced to relinquish the dowry against her own free will.

ANOTHER WARNING

The Holy Quran has given another warning in connection with the payment of the dowry. There are people who maneuver the payment in such a way as to extract a portion or even the whole amount after the payment has been made. Sometime a man who does not like his wife, does not put her away simply by divorcing her as the Islamic law has laid down, but instead leaves her fate hanging in the balance without making any decision and starts ill-treating and bullying her in the hope that she might relinquish her claim to the dowry and return some or all the gifts he had given her at the time of marriage. Islam and the Holy Quran have strongly condemned such practices.

EVILS TO BE SHUNNED

It would be well if we here touched upon some other evils which are creeping into our society. There is a tendency of fixing large dowries which in many cases leads to misunderstandings and friction between the two families and ultimately to the dissolution of the marriage. Islam looks with disfavor upon fixing of large dowries except in exceptional circumstances where it cannot be helped, e.g. the necessity to safeguard the bride's right of inheritance. There are certain families which have a tradition of denying women their right of inheritance. A larger dowry in such a case may counteract that un-Islamic tradition. But apart from such exceptions, unduly large dowries are not to be fixed. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) has said, "Blessed is the marriage which comes about with ease and entails no hardship, it must not entail too heavy a burden of expenses nor should the dowry be too big for the bridegroom to pay."

In our society nowadays, there is the evil of the bride's family spending too much on this occasion. There are instances in which the family has to sell some property or to incur heavy debts. This they do to observe certain old stupid customs and rites with the result that they are crushed under that financial burden and land themselves in a veritable hell thereby.

It is, therefore, our duty to make our marriages simple and keep them within the bounds of our means. The amount fixed for dowry should be commensurate with the financial position of the bridegroom. This will ensure future happiness and peace of mind for both the partners.

AMOUNT OF DOWRY

Hazrat Omar, the Second Caliph said, "If dowries were an indication of worldly glory or of piety in the sight of Allah, then the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) was the most deserving of that distinction. But as far as the record shows the dowries of his daughters and his wives did not exceed 12 '*auquiyas*', which would be equal to about three pounds sterling of today.

The amount for dowry should be fixed according to the

financial standing of the bridegroom, and with the consent of both parties. Hazrat Mirza Bashirud Din Mahmud Ahmad, the second Successor to the Promised Messiah (a.s.) was of the opinion that the sum proposed for dowry should range between the bridegroom's income for six to 12 months. He once said, "Those who fix large dowries, only for show and fail to pay, are guilty of committing a sin. The Companions of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) used to pay the dowry money in advance. Hence, the best thing is to pay it up in advance, if possible. Dowry is, in fact, a debt owed by the husband to his wife." (Alfazl: 15:1 1918).

As the records show, the fact is that the dowries of the Companions of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) were never big. Austerity was the rule of their lives and they were able to pay this debt easily. But nowadays the trend is to have unduly excessive dowries with the result that in most cases the husband fails to pay it up.

Islam calls for the payment of the dowry money willingly and cheerfully.

PROVISION OF MAINTENANCE

Islam has clearly defined the spheres of action for both the husband and the wife. The wife's duty is to stay in the house and manage the domestic affairs, as is mentioned in the Holy Quran. *"And Stay in Your Houses."* The duty of the husband is to earn and to provide for the needs of his wife and children. This is exactly what the word "*qawwaam*" signifies. "*Qawwaam*" is also answerable for the actions and behavior of his dependants. The reason why the role of a "*qawwaam*" is assigned to the male, is also mentioned in the Holy Quran. It says that they (men) have been made guardians over women "*because of what they spend out of their wealth.*" This shows that it is the responsibility of the husband to provide for his wife's subsistence to which she is entitled by law and in case a husband shirks this responsibility, the wife may sue him in court for the restoration of her right.

Nevertheless the standard and the worth of maintenance will not be according to the choice and the desire of the wife, but will be commensurate with the means of the husband. The Holy

Quran has laid down a basic rule for us in this connection. It says: *"The rich man according to his means and the poor man according to his means."* It is therefore wrong if a poor person is required to pay what he cannot afford or a rich man tries to give less than what he can afford.

WIVES DUES

In Abu Da'ood, a well-known collection of Traditions, we have that a Companion once asked the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), "What is due to our wives from us?" The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) replied, "When you dine, make your wife also partake thereof and when you put on clothes, provide garments for her as well. This injunction stipulates that to feed, clothe and provide the necessities of life to the wife, befitting his position, is the responsibility of the husband. If he fails in this, it will affect adversely the health of his children and their social status.

The Holy Quran says.

"Kill not your children for fear of poverty." (17:32).

Niggardliness in providing proper food to one's family for fear of poverty will not only impair the health of children but will also retard the growth of their bodies. Hence it is imperative for us not to be too parsimonious in the matter of our diet. Some people have the means but are not prepared to spend for the legitimate necessities of their wives. It should however, be remembered that Islam prohibits extravagance and does not load the husband beyond his capacity, for it is mentioned in the Quran:

"Let him who has abundance of means spend out of his abundance. And let him whose means of subsistence are straitened, spend out of what Allah has given. Allah burdens not any soul beyond that which He has given it."
(65:8)

LEGITIMATE USE OF PRIVILEGES

It is an important part of a husband's role that he should judiciously exercise his prerogative of being the *"qawwaam"* and not abuse it by behaving like a tyrant. For instance, it would be

unlawful for him to willfully keep from paying heed to some of the just and natural aspirations of his wife simply for the purpose of teasing or punishing her. Islam has prescribed a limit of four months at the most for abstinence. But some men make up their minds that they would not go in to their wives and would keep them in suspense without divorcing them. The Holy Quran says,

“For those who vow abstinence from their wives, the maximum period is four months; then if they go back from the vow, surely Allah is forgiving, merciful.” (2:227).

According to the above verse, the husband is allowed a period of four months in which he has either to reconcile with his mate or to divorce her. Here Allah has ruled against the practice of leaving the wife in a state of suspense.

SUSPENSE DISALLOWED

Sometimes a husband feels an averseness towards his wife. He therefore, decides not to keep her as his wife. But instead of releasing her from his marriage tie by a lawful divorce, he keeps her case pending by withdrawing again and again within the stipulated time, his declaration of divorce. The Holy Quran has strongly condemned this mischievous practice. Allah says,

“And retain them not wrongfully so that you may transgress. And whoso does that, surely he wrongs his own soul. And do not make a jest of the commandments of Allah.” (2:232).

The Quranic concession allowed to the husband or a revocable divorce which entitles him to retract once or even twice before pronouncing the final and irrevocable divorce, aims at affording to both the opportunity to get reconciled and have their normal marital relations restored. But if a man makes a jest of this concession and retracts again and again simply to mortify and humiliate the woman and to hold her bound to him against her wishes, such behavior, in the sight of Allah, is tantamount to making a mockery of the Law of God: who has very strongly prohibited such noxious practice. He says,

“...and harass them not that you may create hardships for them...” (65:7).

TRANSGRESSION

Once a man, in the time of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), said to his wife, "I shall neither divorce you nor shall I, in future, treat you as my lawful wife." The woman said, "How could that be?" The man replied, "I shall pronounce divorce on you but when the stipulated period is about to expire, I will retract and will go on doing it repeatedly so that you may not be able to get your freedom." The woman, therefore, came to the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) and stated her case before him. At this the following verse was revealed by God,

"Such divorce may be pronounced twice; then either retain them in a becoming manner or send them away with kindness." (2:230).

According to the above verse the husband is entitled to use his option to retract only twice. The Arabic words "*zīrar*" and "*t'addī*" have very wide meanings. Anyone who holds up the wife against her will and refuses to liberate her in order to harass her in any way and inflicts physical or mental pain on her by using abusive language or corporal punishment, is guilty of committing a transgression. All such acts are forbidden in Islam. Anyone who behaves in this manner steps out of the bounds of a husband's authority which God has granted him. In such cases the wife has the right to seek redress through a court of law and get her liberty from such a husband.

IMPARTIALITY IN TREATMENT

It is clear from the example and precepts of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) and the writings of the acknowledged jurists of Muslim Law after him, that in the event of plurality of wives, the husband has to observe strict equality in the allocation of expenses for and the periods of his company with each wife. Hazrat Ayesha, one of the wives of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), says, "The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) dealt justly with all his wives and then prayed, "O Allah! So far as it lay in my power I have observed even-handed justice in the treatment of my wives, but my Lord, hold me not responsible for that over which I have no control (*i.e.* the innermost feelings of the heart)."

Prominent divines and scholars of Islam have expressed the same views on this subject. For instance Mujahid has interpreted the Quranic injunction, "*incline not wholly*" thus:

"Do not incline wholly towards one wife so as to deprive the others of their lawful rights, *e.g.*, their proper share of funds for subsistence, their share of association with the husband, etc. Nor should you consign any one of them to the plight of a woman without a husband or a widow." (Ibn-i-Jarir.)

The Holy Quran has also expounded the true sense of parity between wives. It says that so far as the inner feelings of the mind are concerned it is impossible for a man to love all his wives equally, God says:

"And you cannot keep perfect balance between wives, however much you may desire it." (4:130).

But he is required to treat them with equity in all other respects. His stay with each of them should be of equal duration; the provisions for each should be of equal value.

THE RIGHTS OF THE WIFE

In the light of the duties of the husband explained above, the wife's rights would be as follows:

1. The husband should respect and be very mindful of the susceptibilities of his wife.
2. He should try to be a source of comfort to his wife and behave in a manner that she is convinced that she alone is the center of his love and affection.
3. He should provide for all her reasonable needs and, keeping within his means, should be disposed to spending in that respect with an open hand.
4. The husband should participate in the management of the house by giving a hand in the household chores of his spouse.
5. He should look after her health and be always anxious about it.

6. He should refrain from keeping a close watch over every movement of his wife as if he had no confidence in her and thus making her life miserable.
7. He should always be disposed to overlooking the minor shortcoming of his wife and be generous in forgiving and forgetting.
8. He should see that trifles do not lead to a situation in which tempers are lost and threats of divorce and separation are pronounced.
9. He should shun every act or word which is likely to displease or agonize his partner.
10. The husband should display a sense of utmost sympathy if the wife is in some distress or has met with some misfortune.
11. He should not object to his wife meeting her relatives provided no mischief is feared from their side. He should himself also be respectful to them.
12. He should consult his wife in all family matters of importance and handle the situation as decided by mutual consent.
13. If there are more wives than one, the husband must treat them all as equals in every respect, in dress, in food, in living accommodation and in the duration of his stay with each one of them.
14. It is desirable for the husband to have at times an outing along with his family to join them in their jokes and merriment.

SUMMING UP

If the husband plays his part as summed up above, sincerely and in a spirit of magnanimity, and treats his wife with a sense of propriety and decorum, his obligations to her will be discharged.

There is no doubt that woman, by nature a weak and delicate being, is the most aggrieved and oppressed one; she deserves special care and attention from the stronger sex. That is why the

Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) in his final and parting admonition to the Muslims on the occasion of his last pilgrimage to Mecca, laid special stress on the duty of men to be kind and courteous to the fair sex.

The Reformer of our own time, the Promised Messiah (a.s.), has also laid great stress on treating women with courtesy and kindness. He says, "The first and foremost witnesses of a man's piety and behavior are the wives. If your relations with them are not cordial, how can one attain peace with God." (Al Hakam: 17:5-1903).

May Allah grant us both – the men and the women – power to be able to discharge our duties and obligations faithfully to each other as our Heavenly Master desires and as He expects from us.

And our last call is that all praise belongs to Allah the Lord of all the worlds.

(Rendered into English by M.A.K. Ghauri: Rabwah.)